

**NONSTATE ACTORS IN COLOMBIA:
THREAT AND RESPONSE**

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FOREWORD

The common denominator intent of any terrorist group is to impose self-determined desires for “change” on a society, a nation-state, and/or other perceived symbols of power in the global community. The solution to the terrorism threat is not simply to destroy small bands of terrorist fanatics and the governments that support them. Additional measures are needed. That is, once a terrorist group is brought under control or neutralized, multifaceted efforts must be taken to preclude the seeds that created that organization from germinating again. Given these realities within the context of the contemporary global security environment, the United States has little choice but to reexamine and rethink national and global stability and security—and a peaceful and more prosperous tomorrow.

In these terms, the author, Dr. Max Manwaring, seeks to do several things. He outlines the violent characteristics of the new security-stability environment and briefly examines the problem of terrorism and the related problem of governance. Then he analyzes the complex threat and response situation and outlines a multidimensional response to these problems. Finally, he enumerates some civil-military implications for playing effectively in the contemporary global security arena. His recommendations focus on the interagency arena and the military in general, and the U.S. Army in particular. By airing this range of geopolitical perspectives, the Strategic Studies Institute hopes to contribute to the building of a new, 21st century U.S. interagency and military strategy.

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SUMMARY

Global political violence is clashing with global economic integration. More often than not, the causes and consequences of the resultant instabilities tend to be exploited by such destabilizers as rogue states, substate and transnational political actors, insurgents, illegal drug traffickers, organized criminals, warlords, ethnic cleansers, militant fundamentalists, and 1,000 other “snakes with a cause”—and the will to conduct terrorist and other asymmetric warfare. The intent is to impose self-determined desires for “change” on a society, nation-state, and/or other perceived symbols of power in the global community—and, perhaps, revert to the questionable glories of the 12th century.

In these conditions—exacerbated by the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, and by the devastating U.S.-led attacks on Afghanistan subsequently—the United States has little choice but to reexamine and rethink national and global stability and security—and a peaceful and more prosperous tomorrow.

To help civilian and military leaders analyze the implications of the contemporary global security environment, the author attempts several things. First, he outlines the violent characteristics of the new security arena. Second, he briefly examines the relationship of the central strategic problems in the contemporary environment—terrorism and governance. Third, he describes the complex threat situation. Fourth, he presents a basic outline for a reasoned multidimensional political-economic stability capability-building response to these problems. Finally, he enumerates some civil-military implications for playing effectively in the global security arena. His recommendations focus on implications for the military in general and the U.S. Army in particular.

NONSTATE ACTORS IN COLOMBIA: THREAT AND RESPONSE

The terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, DC, on September 11, 2001, reminded Americans of realities long understood in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. That is, terrorism is a very practical, calculated, and cynical strategy of warfare for the weak to use against the strong. It is a generalized political-psychological asymmetric substitute for conventional military war.¹ The intent is to coerce substantive political change.²

Now, for the first time since the end of the Cold War, political and military leaders are rethinking the U.S. global role and supporting strategies. They are now discussing these issues in terms of the political and military transitions required to deal more effectively with the global security problems that were submerged in the morass of the East-West conflict and unleashed by the Eastern European revolutions of 1989. In these terms, Colombia is emerging as the most compelling issue on the hemispheric agenda. That country's deeply rooted and ambiguous warfare has reached crisis proportions in that Colombia's "Hobbesian Trinity" of illegal drug traffickers, insurgents, and paramilitary organizations are creating a situation in which life is indeed "nasty, brutish, and short."³

The first step in developing a macro-level vision, policy, and strategy to deal with the Colombian crisis in a global context is to be clear on what the Colombian crisis is, and what the fundamental threats implicit (and explicit) in it are. Political and military leaders can start thinking about the gravity of the terrorist strategy employed by Colombia's stateless adversaries from this point. It is also the point from which leaders can begin developing responses designed to secure Colombian, hemispheric, and global stability. In this monograph, then, the author seeks to

explain the Colombian crisis in terms of nonstate threats to the state and to the region—and appropriate strategic-level responses.

The Context of the Colombian Crisis.

In the 1930s and 1940s, chronic political, economic, and social problems created by a self-serving civilian oligarchy began to bring about yet another crisis in a long list of internal conflicts in Colombian history. In 1930, Liberal reformists came to power and deprived Conservatives of the control of the central government and extensive local patronage. The Liberals also initiated an ambitious social agenda that generated increasing civil violence between Conservative and Liberal partisans.⁴

The catalyst that ignited the 18-year period called “the violence” in April 1948 was the “assassination” of Liberal populist, Jorge Eliecer Gaitan. That murder sparked a riot known as the *Bogotazo* that left much of the capital destroyed and an estimated 2,000 dead. Although the government was able to contain the situation in Bogota, it could not control the violence that spread through the countryside. Rural violence became the norm as an estimated 20,000 armed Liberal and Conservative combatants settled old political scores. Over the period from 1948-66, *la violencia* claimed the lives of over 200,000 Colombians.⁵

The illegal drug industry began to grow and prosper in this unstable environment of virtually uncontrolled violence, rural poverty, political disarray, and government weakness. That prosperity in turn provided resources that allowed insurgent organizations to grow and expand. Later, as the Colombian government proved less and less effective in controlling the national territory and the people in it, the self-defense paramilitary groups emerged.⁶ The thread that permitted these violent nonstate actors to develop, grow, and succeed was—and is—adequate freedom of movement and action over time. The dynamics of the Hobbesian

Trinity, within the context of the almost constant instability and violence over the past several decades, have substantially expanded freedom of movement and action and correspondingly eroded that of the state.⁷

Virtually anyone with any kind of resolve can take advantage of the instability engendered by the ongoing Colombian crisis. The tendency is that the best motivated and best armed organization on the scene will eventually control that instability for its own narrow purposes.

Colombia's Three Wars.

The problem in Colombia is that this country and its potential are deteriorating because of three ongoing, simultaneous, and interrelated wars involving the illegal drug industry; various insurgent organizations (primarily the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia [FARC]); and “vigilante” paramilitary groups (the United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia [AUC]). This unholy trinity of nonstate actors is perpetrating a level of corruption, criminality, human horror, and internal (and external) instability that—if left unchecked at the strategic level—can ultimately threaten Colombia’s survival as an organized democratic state and undermine the political stability and sovereignty of its neighbors. In that connection, explicit recognition now is that Colombia’s current situation has reached crisis proportions.⁸ The critical point of this argument is that the substance, or essence, of the Colombian crisis centers on the general organization, activities, and threats of the major violent stateless actors at work in that country.

The Narcos. The illegal drug industry in Colombia can be described as a consortium that functions in much the same way as virtually any multinational Fortune 500 company. Products are made, sold, and shipped; bankers and financial planners handle the monetary issues; and lawyers deal with the legal problems.⁹ The consortium is organized to achieve super efficiency and maximum profit. It has its “capos”

(chief executive officers and boards of directors), its councils, system of justice, public affairs officers, negotiators, project managers—and its enforcers. And, it operates in virtually every country in the Western Hemisphere and Europe.¹⁰

Additionally, the illegal drug industry has at its disposal a very efficient organizational structure, the latest in high-tech communications equipment and systems, and state-of-the-art weaponry. With these advantages, decisions are made quickly that can ignore or supersede laws, regulations, decisions, and actions of most of the governments of the nation-states in which the organization operates. Narcos also have assassinated, bribed, corrupted, intimidated, and terrorized government leaders, members of the Congress, judges, law enforcement and military officers, journalists, and even soccer players. As such, the illegal drug industry is a major agent for destabilizing and weakening the state governmental apparatus.

At the same time, narco cosmetic patronage to the poor, creation of their own electoral machinery, participation openly in traditional political parties, and financing of friendly election campaigns have facilitated even greater influence over the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of Colombian government. That activity exacerbates the necessity of meeting the narcos' needs and demonstrates the necessity of meeting their expectations and demands. All this mitigates against responsible government—and against any allegiance to the notion of the public good and political equality. In that process, the consortium has achieved a symbiotic relationship with the state and, in a sense, is becoming a virtual super-state within the state.¹¹

The Insurgents. The FARC insurgents are essentially a Marxist-Leninist *foco* (i.e., insurrectionary armed enclave) in search of a mass base.¹² Because of the general lack of appeal to the Colombian population, the insurgents have developed a military organization designed to achieve the

“armed colonization” of successive areas within the Colombian national territory.¹³ The intent is to liberate and mobilize the “disaffected and the dispossessed” population into an alternative society.¹⁴ That is, FARC responded to the lack of popular support, as did the communists in Vietnam, by attempting to dominate the “human terrain.” In this effort, FARC has proved every bit as ruthless as the Viet Cong. Torture and assassination—to say nothing of kidnapping, extortion, intimidation, and other terrorist tactics—are so common as to go almost without comment except in the most extreme cases.¹⁵ Strategically, operationally, and tactically, the FARC approach is the Vietnamese approach.¹⁶

All this probably would have remained more or less out of sight and out of mind of mainstream Colombia in the underpopulated and underconsidered rural areas of the country if it had not been for the financial support provided by the illegal drug phenomenon. In 1982, a decision was taken by the Seventh Conference of the FARC to develop links with the Colombian drug industry that would provide the money—and manpower—necessary for the creation of a “true democracy.”¹⁷ As a result, FARC expanded from approximately 2,000 guerrilla fighters in 1982 to over 70 fronts (company-sized units) with 18,000-20,000 fighters in 2001. This illicit funding has provided the FARC with the capability of confronting regular Colombian military units up to battalion size, and of overrunning police and military installations and smaller units. Moreover, insurgent presence has spread from 173 municipalities in 1985 to 622 in 1995, out of a total of approximately 1,050.¹⁸

Thus, Colombian insurgents have taken control of large portions of the countryside and placed themselves in positions from which to move into or dominate the major population centers. The stated intent is to create an army of 30,000 with which to stage a “final offensive” against the regular armed forces and “do away with the state as it now exists in Colombia.”¹⁹ In these terms, through the control of large parts of the Colombian national territory, the

insurgents are replacing the state. In that connection, the insurgents are denying the state its traditional “monopoly on violence,” and are challenging central government authority over the other parts of the country still under government control.

The Paramilitaries. The AUC self-defense organizations are semi-autonomous regional alliances relatively independent of each other. Nevertheless, a central organization exists primarily to develop a national coordinated strategy against the insurgents. Additionally, the AUC national front organization provides guidance, training, and other help to member organizations as necessary. Strategy and tactics of the AUC, interestingly, mirror those of the insurgents. They seek to expand their control of grass-roots levels of government—municipalities or townships (*municipios*) and rural areas (*corregimientos*), and to exercise political influence through the control, intimidation, or replacement of local officials. And, like the insurgents, the paramilitaries profit from drug trafficking.²⁰

These “vigilante” groups began as self-defense organizations for the protection of family, property, and the law and order of a given geographical area. Because of the AUC’s orientation against the insurgents and willingness to provide fundamental justice and personal security to those defined as “noncollaborators” with the insurgents, they have consistently improved their standing in the Colombian society. As examples, the number of small AUC groups have increased from 273 to more than 400, with an estimated current total of up to 8,000 active combatants. Moreover, the paramilitaries have organized, trained, and equipped “shock brigades” that since 1996 have become capable of successfully challenging insurgent military formations. Finally, in 2001 AUC groups are estimated to have an armed presence in about 40 percent of the municipalities in the country.²¹

Despite paramilitary success against insurgents where the state has been absent or ineffective and growing popular support, the Colombian government has disavowed the AUC. As such, the paramilitaries have become a third set of competing nonstate actors—along with the various insurgent organizations and the illegal drug consortium—challenging the authority of the state, and claiming the right to control all or a part of the national territory.

Conclusion. Each of the three armed nonstate players in the Colombian crisis separately generates formidable problems, challenges, and threats to the state and the region in its own right. What, then, of an alliance of the willing—even if that alliance represents a complicated mosaic of mutual and conflicting interests?

The Narco-Insurgent-Paramilitary Nexus.

Within the past 3 or 4 decades, the nature of insurgencies has changed dramatically throughout the world with what Dr. Steven Metz calls “commercial insurgency and the search for wealth.”²² One of the most far-reaching transformations began in the 1970s with the growing involvement of insurgent forces with narco-traffickers in the Middle East and Asia. Lebanon and the Golden Triangle come quickly to mind.²³ Thus, the narco-insurgent connection is not new, and it is not confined to Latin America. The question, then, is not whether there might be an alliance between the illegal drug industry, the insurgents, and the paramilitaries in Colombia. That has been understood and admitted since the 1980s.²⁴ The question is whether the threats associated with that union warrant real concern and a serious strategic response.

Motives and Linkages. The motives for the narco-insurgent-paramilitary alliance are straightforward. They are accumulation of wealth, control of territory and people, freedom of movement and action, and legitimacy.

Together, these elements represent usable power—power to allocate values and resources in a society.

The equation that links illegal narcotics trafficking to insurgency and to the paramilitaries in Colombia—and elsewhere—turns on a combination of need, organizational infrastructure development, ability, and the availability of sophisticated communications and weaponry.²⁵ For example, the drug industry possesses cash and lines of transportation and communication. Insurgent and paramilitary organizations have followers, organization, and discipline. Traffickers need these to help protect their assets and project their power within and among nationstates. Insurgents and paramilitaries are in constant need of logistical and communications support—and money.²⁶

Together, the alliance has the economic and military power equal to or better than that of most nation-states in the world today. This alliance also has another advantage. All three groups possess relatively flat organizational structures and sophisticated communications systems that, when combined, create a mechanism that is considerably more effective and efficient than any slow-moving bureaucratic and hierarchical governmental system. That combined organizational advantage is a major source of power in itself.²⁷

Internal Objectives. The narco-insurgent-paramilitary alliance is not simply individual or institutional intimidation for financial or criminal gain. And it is not just the use of insurgents and AUC groups as “hired guns” to protect illegal drug cultivation, production, and trafficking. Those are only business transactions. Rather, the long-term objective of the alliance is to control or substantively change the Colombian political system.²⁸

Narcos may not seek the overthrow of the government—as long as the government is weak and can be controlled to allow maximum freedom of movement and action.²⁹ The insurgents, on the other hand, seek the

eventual destruction of the state as it exists. Whether or not the insurgents are reformers or criminals is irrelevant. Their avowed objective is to take direct control of the government and the state.³⁰ Likewise, the paramilitaries want fundamental change. It appears that they are interested in creating a strong state that is capable of unquestioned enforcement of law and order. Whether or not the vigilante groups are “democratic” or authoritarian is also irrelevant. For their own self-preservation, they have little choice but to take direct or indirect control of the state.³¹ The common narco-insurgent-paramilitary governmental change or overthrow effort, therefore, is directed at the political community and its institutions. In this sense, the nexus is not simply criminal in nature. It is more. It is a major political-psychological-moral-military entity. At the same time, the countryside ceases to be a simple theater for combat and becomes a setting for the building of real local power.

The Latin American security dialogue does not generally refer to the narco-insurgent-paramilitary nexus in terms of their individual identities—at least in the sense of a business organization striving to control the price of drugs, weapons, or general protection. Rather, it tends to refer to the whole entity as greater than the sum of its parts. The security dialogue is concerned about a political-economic-military force that has become a major national and transnational nonstate actor. That actor threatens national stability, development, and the future of the democratic system not only in Colombia but in the entire Western Hemisphere.³² To be sure, this is a loose and dynamic merger subject to many vicissitudes, but the “marriage of convenience” has lasted and appears to be getting stronger.

External Objectives. The narco-insurgent-paramilitary alliance appears to have developed a political agenda for exerting leverage in the international as well as the Colombian national arena. The perceived goal of a given national agenda is to promote an “egalitarian social

revolution” that will open up opportunities for “everybody”—and give the organization the legitimate basis for controlling some sort of nationalistic “narcocracy.” The objectives of the international political agenda are to establish acceptance, credibility, and legitimacy among the sovereign states with which the general organization must negotiate.³³

In that connection, the spill-over effects of the illegal drug and arms trafficking industry have inspired criminal violence, corruption, and instability throughout Latin America in general and Caribbean transit countries in particular. For some time, the illegal drug industry has operated back and forth across Colombia’s borders and adjacent seas. Colombian insurgents and paramilitary groups have also made frequent incursions into the neighboring countries of Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela. The resulting destabilization undermines the security, well-being, and sovereignty of these countries.³⁴ A 1992 report by the West Indian Commission captures the essence of the scope and gravity of this “equal opportunity” phenomenon:

Nothing poses greater threats to civil society in [Caribbean] countries than the drug problem, and nothing exemplifies the powerlessness of regional governments more. That is the magnitude of the damage that drug abuse and trafficking hold for our Community. It is a many-layered danger. At base is the human destruction implicit in drug addiction; but implicit also is the corruption of individuals and systems by the sheer enormity of the inducements of the illegal drug trade in relatively poor societies. On top of all this lie the implications for governance itself—at the hands of both external agencies engaged in inter-national interdicting, and the drug barons themselves—the “dons” of the modern Caribbean—who threaten governance from within.³⁵

Colombia is particularly important in this situation because the narco-insurgent-paramilitary alliance represents a dual threat to the authority of that government—and to those of its hemispheric neighbors. It

challenges the central governance of countries affected, and it undermines the vital institutional pillars of regime legitimacy and stability.³⁶

The Internal and External Responses. Colombia, the United States, and other countries that might ultimately be affected by the destabilizing consequences of the narco-insurgent-paramilitary nexus in Colombia have tended to deal with the problem in a piecemeal fashion or even ignore it. For 40 years the various Colombian governments dealt with the problem on a completely *ad hoc* basis—without a strategic-level plan, without adequate or timely intelligence, without a consensus among the political, economic, and military elites about how to deal with the armed opposition, and, importantly, within an environment of mutual enmity between the civil government and the armed forces.³⁷ With the promulgation of *Plan Colombia* in 2000, there is at least the basis of a coherent political project, but not much else.³⁸

The United States has tended to ignore the insurgent and paramilitary problems in Colombia—except for making rhetorical statements regarding the peace process, terrorist activities, and human rights violations. The United States has focused its money, training, and attention almost entirely on the counterdrug campaign. It has seen the Colombian crisis in limited terms—the number of hectares of coca eradicated, and the number of kilos of coca that have been detected and destroyed. And, even though the United States and Colombia have achieved a series of tactical “successes” in the coca fields, the laboratories, and on the streets, the violent nonstate actors remain strong and become ever more wealthy. In the meantime, Colombia continues to deteriorate and becomes ever more fragile.³⁹

Finally, the other countries that are affected by the nefarious activities of the narco-insurgent-paramilitary nexus tend to be doing little more than watching, debating, and wrangling about what—if anything—to do about the seemingly new and unknown phenomenon.⁴⁰ As a

consequence, positive political sovereignty, territory, infrastructure, stability, and security are quietly and slowly destroyed—and tens of thousands of innocents continue to be displaced and die.

Conclusion. These are the realities of power operating in the Colombian crisis. Several years ago, Abmael Guzman reminded us that “Except for power, everything else is illusion.”⁴¹

Where the Hobbesian Trinity Leads.

Nonstate criminal-terrorist organizations such as those that constitute the Colombian narco-insurgent-paramilitary nexus are significant political actors with the ability to compromise the integrity and sovereignty of individual nation-states. This is a fact that neither the public policy nor the academic International Relations communities have completely grasped. Many political and military leaders see the violent nonstate actor as a low-level law enforcement issue that does not require sustained policy attention. Many academicians are accustomed to thinking of nonstate actors as bit players on a local stage. That may be the case in the early stages of their development, but is certainly not the case in Colombia today.⁴²

Threats from the “Hobbesian Trinity” at work in Colombia today come in many forms and in a matrix of different kinds of challenges—varying in scope and scale. If they have a single feature in common, however, it is that they are systemic and well-calculated attempts to achieve political ends.⁴³ In that connection, we briefly explore two of the many consequences the narco-insurgent-paramilitary union has generated. First, we examine the erosion of Colombian democracy; then we consider the erosion of the state.

The Erosion of Colombian Democracy. The policy-oriented definition of democracy that has been

generally accepted and used in U.S. foreign policy over the past several years is probably best described as “procedural democracy.” This definition tends to focus on the election of civilian political leadership and—perhaps—on a relatively high level of participation on the part of the electorate. Thus, as long as a country is able to hold elections, it is still considered a democracy—regardless of the level of accountability, transparency, corruption, and ability to extract and distribute resources for national development and protection of human rights and liberties.⁴⁴

In Colombia we observe important paradoxes. Elections are held on a regular basis—but leaders, candidates, and elected politicians are also regularly assassinated. As an example, numerous governmental officials have been assassinated *following* their election—138 mayors and 569 members of parliament, deputies, and city council members were murdered between 1989 and 1999, along with 174 public officials in other positions. This is not to mention the judiciary. In 1987 alone, 53 members of the judiciary were assassinated.⁴⁵ Additionally, intimidation, direct threats, and the use of violence on a given person and his family play an important role *prior* to elections. And, as a corollary, it is important to note that, although the media is free from state censorship, journalists and academicians who make their opinions known through the press are systematically assassinated.⁴⁶

It is hard to credit Colombian elections as “democratic” or “free.” Neither competition nor participation in elections can be complete in an environment where armed and unscrupulous nonstate actors compete violently to control government—before and after elections. Moreover, it is hard to credit Colombia as a democratic state as long as elected leaders are subject to controls or vetoes imposed by vicious nonstate actors. As a consequence, Ambassador David Jordan argues that Colombia is an “anocratic democracy.” That is, Colombia is a state that has the procedural features of democracy, but retains the features of an autocracy where the ruling elite faces no

accountability.⁴⁷ Professor Eduardo Pizarro describes Colombia as a “besieged democracy” and writes about the “partial collapse” of the state.⁴⁸ In either case, the actions of the narco-insurgent-paramilitary alliance have pernicious effects on democracy, and tend to erode the ability of the state to carry out its legitimizing functions.

The Partial Collapse of the State. The Colombian state has undergone severe erosion on two general levels. First, the state’s presence and authority has physically diminished over large geographical portions of the country. Second, the idea of the partial collapse of the state is closely related to the nonphysical erosion of democracy. Jordan argues that corruption is key in this regard and is a prime mover toward “narcosocialism.”⁴⁹

In the first instance, the notion of “partial collapse” refers to the fact that there is an absence or only partial presence of state institutions in over 60 percent of the rural municipalities of the country. Also, even in those areas that are not under the direct control of narco, insurgent, or paramilitary organizations, institutions responsible for protecting citizens—notably, the police and judiciary—have eroded to the point where they are unable to carry out their basic individual and collective security functions. Indicators of this problem can be seen in two statistics. First, the murder rate in Colombia is the highest per capita in the world at 41,564 in 1999.⁵⁰ Second, the proportion of homicides that end with a conviction is less than 4 percent.⁵¹ These alarming indicators of impunity strongly confirm that the state is not exercising adequate control of its territory or people.

In the second instance, nonphysical erosion of the state centers on the widespread and deeply entrenched issue of corruption. As an example, in 1993 and 1994 the U.S. Government alluded to the fact that former-President Ernesto Samper had received money from narcotics traffickers. Later, in 1996, based on that information, the United States withdrew Samper’s visa and decertified

Colombia for not cooperating in combating illegal drug trafficking. Subsequently, the Colombian Congress absolved Samper of all drug charges by a vote of 111-43.⁵² Not surprisingly, another indicator of government corruption at the highest levels is found in the Colombian Congress. The Senate decriminalized the issue of “illicit enrichment” by making it a misdemeanor that could be prosecuted only after the commission of a felony.⁵³ Moreover, a former U.S. Ambassador to Colombia asserted—in public and without fear of contradiction—that about 70 percent of the Colombian Congress “is bent.”⁵⁴ Clearly, the reality of corruption in government favoring the illegal drug industry in Colombia is inimical to the public good.

Finally, contemporary nontraditional conflict with nonstate actors is not a kind of appendage—a lesser or limited thing—to the more comfortable military-to-military paradigm. It is a great deal more. As long as opposition exists that is willing to risk all to take down violently a government and establish its own—or a surrogate—there is war. This is a zero-sum game in which there is only one winner. It is thus, total. In *The Constant Gardener*, John LeCarre vividly captures the political implications of the type of nonstate threats that must be confronted today. He outlines the answer to the question of “When is a state not a state?” from the point of view of a common sense practitioner:

I would suggest to you that, these days, very roughly, the qualifications for being a civilized state amount to—electoral suffrage, ah—protection of life and property—um, justice, health and education for all, at least to a certain level—then the maintenance of a sound administrative infrastructure—and roads, transport, drains, et cetera—and—what else is there?—ah yes, the equitable collection of taxes. If a state fails to deliver on at least a quorum of the above—then one *has* to say the contract between state and citizen begins to look pretty *shaky*—and if it fails on *all* of the above, then it’s a *failed* state, as we say these days.⁵⁵

Nonstate actors using asymmetric terrorist political-psychological strategies are pervasive in the world today. The general threat(s) to regime stability and existence generated by the Colombian narco-insurgent-paramilitary nexus is only one case in point. In light of the dynamics of violent stateless actors, there is ample reason for worldwide concern—and action.

Where To from Here?

In the post-Cold War era, the dominant threats to Colombia, the Western Hemisphere, and most of the rest of the world are manifested in nontraditional ways. The most acute national security challenges are transnational threats that emanate from violent nonstate actors. If not confronted effectively, they can corrupt and subvert the very fabric of society and the fundamental institutions of law and order. This type of conflict now involves entire civil populations—not just “enemy” military formations. This type of conflict also involves the relative ability of the parties to a conflict such as that in Colombia to shift the proverbial “hearts and minds”—and support—of the people in their respective favor. Finally, this type of conflict demands a coherent and multidimensional political-psychological, socio-economic, and military police-people oriented response.

Toward a Populace Oriented Model. Sun Tzu warned that, “In War, numbers alone confer no advantage. Do not advance relying on sheer military power.”⁵⁶ None other than Clausewitz points out that, in the type of conflict taking place in Colombia, there are two nontraditional centers of gravity (i.e., the hub of all power and movement upon which everything depends). They are public opinion and the leadership that organizes and directs that opinion.⁵⁷ In that context, the dynamic competition for the allegiance of the people demands a multidimensional model. Such a model would depict the activities and efforts of the various political actors involved in their attempts to achieve their strategic

vision and ultimate political objectives. It would portray the allegiance of a people as the primary center of gravity.

The balance of persuasive and coercive attempts to bring “hearts and minds” to one player or another will determine success or failure. In these terms, the government and its external allies can coerce, persuade, and demonstrate the populace into supportive actions on their own behalf. Internal illegal adversaries and their allies can do the same thing. This is a dangerous “double-edged sword.” Thus, a targeted government must attack these “new” centers of gravity, while at the same time protecting its own corresponding centers of gravity. Importantly, the public opinion center of gravity is likely to be the same for all parties to the conflict. It is in this dialectic that only one victor can possibly emerge.⁵⁸

Even though every internal conflict, such as that in Colombia, is situation specific, it is not completely unique. Throughout the universe of intranational war cases, there are analytical commonalities. Three broadly inclusive elements contribute most directly to the allegiance of the populace and the achievement of a given end-state. The essential foundational elements for a targeted government are postulated as clusters of closely related political, economic, social, and security activities that must be performed at the strategic/macro level. There is very little glamour, excitement, and sound-bite material in much of the work outlined below. But these basic elements are the proven keys to a stable, peaceful, and prosperous world. They are: (1) establishing security, (2) capability building, and (3) nurturing legitimate governance.⁵⁹

Establishing Security. A fundamental societal requirement is for its government to provide security—that is, “to insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense . . .”⁶⁰ It begins with the provision of personal security to individual members of the society. It extends to protection from violent internal (including criminals) and external enemies—and perhaps from repressive internal

institutions (e.g., the military, police, and self-appointed vigilante groups). The security problem ends with the establishment of firm but fair control over the entire national territory.

Strategic planners must understand that once an illegal internal enemy—such as Colombia’s “Hobbesian Trinity” of insurgents, narco-barons, and “paramilitary” vigilante groups—becomes firmly established, reform and development efforts are insufficient to deal with the entire security problem. The illegal violent adversaries will finally be defeated only by a superior organization and a political-military strategy designed to neutralize or eliminate it. The sum of the parts of a desired countereffort to deal with a major internal security threat requires not only a certain political competence to coordinate a wide-scale political-economic-psychological-military security effort, but also to exert effective, discrete, and deadly force.⁶¹ It must be remembered, too, that for ultimate effectiveness, political and security forces must also be able to deal with the illegal nonstate opposition on the basis of the rule of law.⁶²

In addition to the need to establish and maintain the rule of law, personal and collective freedom from intimidation and violence (i.e., providing security) includes two other elements. First is a need to politically, psychologically, economically, and militarily isolate the warring political and criminal factions from all sources of internal and external support. Second, security implicitly requires sustaining life, relieving suffering, and regenerating a distressed economy. At base, however, enforcing and maintaining the rule of law takes us back to where we began—to whatever it takes to establish and maintain the effective control of the national territory and the people in it.⁶³

Capability Building for Sustainable Development and Peace. Another societal requirement for popular support to government and the state is that of political, economic, and

social development. The reasons are straightforward. This is the basis for internal strengthening of the state and for demonstrating that government is, in fact, responsive to the needs of the people. Such a system is inherently “just” and stable. Experience shows that the level of a regime’s ability to fairly and effectively collect and allocate resources for personal security and sustainable development is a significant measure of legitimate governance.⁶⁴

The international security dialogue focuses on the problem of national economic development. Underdevelopment and resultant individual and collective poverty are being recognized as the world’s most overwhelming threats. On the positive side of capability-building for sustainable development, the term implies the development of political competence that can and will manage the development of the national economy honestly and effectively. On the negative side of this problem, ignoring the political competence variable within the context of a socio-economic development program implies all of the instabilities and threats associated with illegal nonstate corrosion of the fabric of society.⁶⁵

In the past, it was expected that stimulation of the economy would automatically lead to societal stability and political development in the long term. Somehow, stimulation of the economy was also expected to improve economic disparities, equity, and justice. That has not happened. Experience demonstrates that in order to generate a viable political competence that can and will manage, coordinate, and sustain security and economic development, it is necessary to accomplish three additional goals: to eliminate (or at least control) corruption; foster political consent on the part of the various components of the national population; and establish and maintain popularly accepted peaceful societal conflict resolution processes. With these building blocks in place, a legitimate civil society and sustainable peace become real possibilities.⁶⁶

Nurturing a Civil Society and Legitimate Governance. Finally, in nurturing a sustainable civil society and a durable internal peace, it is also necessary to develop the aggressive unified political-diplomatic, socio-economic, psychological-moral, and military-police engagement in society that can and will deal effectively with the multidimensional root causes that brought on the instability and violence in Colombia in the first place. The intent and requirement is to eliminate the corruption and generate the societal acceptance and support that governing institutions need to adequately and fairly manage internal governance—and to guarantee individual and collective well-being.

Generally, this requires a concerted anticorruption and public diplomacy effort. It is important to remember that no policy, no strategy, and no internal or foreign engagement can be sustained for any length of time without at least the tacit support of the people involved. The hard evidence over time from around the world demonstrates the absolute necessity of protecting one's own center of gravity while taking the offensive against that of an adversary.

This takes us directly to the issue of legitimate governance. No group or force can legislate or decree legitimacy for itself. It must develop, sustain, and enhance moral legitimacy by its actions over time. Legitimization and internal stability derive from popular and institutional perceptions that authority is genuine and effective, and uses morally correct means for reasonable and fair purposes. The wisdom of Sun Tzu is, again, relevant. He argues that, "Those who excel in war first cultivate their own humanity and justice and maintain their laws and institutions. By these means they make their governments invincible."⁶⁷ The implication is clear—a decision that the political, psychological, economic, and security actions necessary to address this societal requirement are "too hard" will result in a final decision for failure.

Conclusions. Implementing the recommended extraordinary challenges of reform and regeneration outlined above will not be easy. That will, however, be far less demanding and costly in political, economic, social, and military terms than allowing the causes of the conflict to continue to be exploited by Colombia's Hobbesian Trinity—and to continue to foster the crises that can lead to the detriment and ultimate failure of the state.

Implications for the Military: Two Keys to Planning and Implementing Strategic Clarity—and Success.

The common denominator of the security dialogue in Colombia and the Western Hemisphere is the underlying issue of national, regional, and international instability. Solutions to the instability exploited by Colombia's violent Hobbesian Trinity of nonstate actors are based on the fundamental requirement that the armed forces, police, and civilian elements of society develop a working relationship that will facilitate the achievement of legitimate national security.

The accomplishment of this most formidable task within the context of illegal insurgent, narco-trafficker, and paramilitary violence requires two fundamental strategic efforts. The first involves the political, coalitional, and multiorganizational partnership requirements that mandate doctrinal and organizational change for strategic clarity and greater effectiveness in any conflict situation. This in turn depends on a second effort: the development of professional civil-military leadership that will ensure not just unity of military command, but unity of civil-military effort.⁶⁸ Both these efforts demand a carefully staffed, phased, and long-term validation, planning, and implementation program. The recommended basic direction for these efforts is outlined as follows.

Partnership Requirements. The United States is not the only political actor in the global security arena, and it is not the only player in more specific smaller-scale contingency or

stability operations. At the same time, the U.S. military is not the only actor in any kind of U.S. involvement in the global security environment. A bewildering array of U.S. civilian agencies, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations, as well as coalition and host country government civilian and military organizations, respond to complex emergencies such as that in Colombia. For any degree of success in “going beyond declaring victory and going home” and actually providing the foundations of a sustainable peace, involvement must be understood as a holistic process that relies on various U.S., host country, international organization, and other civilian and military agencies and institutions working together in an integrated fashion. The creation of that unity of effort to gain ultimate success must be addressed at different levels.

At the highest level, the primary parties to a given conflict must be in general agreement with regard to the objectives of a political vision and the associated set of operations. And, although such an agreement regarding a strategic or operational end-state is a necessary condition for effective partnership, it is not sufficient. Sufficiency and clarity are achieved by adding appropriate policy implementation and military management structure—and “mind-set adjustments”—at the following three additional levels.

The next level of effort requires an executive-level management structure that can and will ensure continuous cooperative planning and execution of policy among and between the relevant U.S. civilian and military agencies (i.e., vertical coordination). That structure must also ensure that all political-military action at the operational and tactical levels directly contributes to the achievement of the mutually agreed strategic political end-state. This requirement reflects a need to improve coordination within the operational theater, and between the theater commander and Washington.⁶⁹

Third, steps must be taken to ensure clarity, unity, and effectiveness by integrating coalition military, international organization, and nongovernmental organization processes with U.S. political-military planning and implementing processes (i.e., horizontal coordination). It has become quite clear that the political end-state is elusive, and operations suffer when there is no strategic planning structure empowered to integrate the key multinational and multiorganizational civil-military elements of a given operation. It is also clear that duplication of effort, and other immediate consequences of the absence of such a strategic planning body, is costly in political, personnel, and financial terms. The lessons have been demonstrated over and over again in such diverse cases as the relatively recent natural disaster hurricane relief operation in Central America (i.e., Hurricane Mitch), and the various man-made disaster relief operations in the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, and Afghanistan.⁷⁰

At a base level, however, unity of effort requires education as well as organizational solutions. Even with an adequate planning and organizational structure, ambiguity, confusion, and tensions are likely to emerge. Only when and if the various civilian and military leaders involved in an operation can develop the judgment and empathy necessary to work cooperatively and collegially will they be able to plan and conduct the operations that meet the needs of the host nation, and use the appropriate capabilities of the U.S. interagency community, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and coalition/partner military forces. Effective partnership ultimately entails the type of professional civilian and military education and leader development that results in effective diplomacy, as well as to professional competence.⁷¹

Leader Development and Professionalization. Until civilian and military leaders learn to think and act strategically and cooperatively within the global security environment, the United States and the rest of the global

community face unattractive alternatives. They can either leave forces in place to maintain a *de facto* military occupation, as in Cyprus, or they can depart the scene with the sure knowledge that a given conflict will erupt again and again, as in Rwanda. As in the later case, the time, treasure, and blood expended will have been for nothing. At a minimum, there are five educational and cultural imperatives to modify Cold War and ethno-centric mind-sets, and to develop the leader judgment needed to deal effectively with complex, politically dominated, multidimensional, multiorganizational, multinational, and multicultural contingencies.⁷²

First is the need to attune military and police minds to cope with the many ways that political and psychological considerations affect the use—and nonuse—of force. Second is a requirement to attune military, police, and civilian minds to understand that the number of battlefield victories or the number of “enemies” arrested or killed only has meaning to the extent that such achievements contribute directly to the legitimate strengthening of the state. Third is a need to teach military, police, and civilian participants in “our savage wars of peace” how to communicate and deal with a diversity of civil-military cultures. Fourth is a requirement to teach military and civilian officials at all levels how to cooperatively plan and implement interagency, international organization, nongovernmental organization, and coalition/partnership civil-military operations. Finally and importantly, nonstate actors in an unstable situation such as that in Colombia are likely to have at their disposal an awesome array of conventional and unconventional weaponry. Thus, education and training programs for peace-enforcement and stability operations must prepare soldiers to be effective warfighters.⁷³

The professionalization and leader development imperatives listed above provide the bases of the understanding and judgment that civilian and military leaders must have to be successful in a contemporary

conflict like that in Colombia. The ultimate requirement is to generate and encourage a thinking process and an understanding of grand strategy that will allow one to be clear on what the situation in Colombia *is* and what it *is not*. The hard evidence over time underscores the wisdom of Clausewitz's dictum, "The first, the supreme, the most far reaching act of judgment that the statesman and the commander have to make is to establish the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature."⁷⁴

A Cautionary Note. To dismiss the above strategic-level recommendations for civilian and military leadership development and professionalization as "too difficult," "unrealistic in the midst of war," or "simply impossible" is to accept the inevitability of defeat. Are there any examples in history? A relatively recent and positive example is that of El Salvador in its struggle against the externally supported violent nonstate Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) actors. Although that effort did not achieve the ideal, from 1979 to 1989, "Salvadorans successfully expanded what was essentially a twelve thousand-strong 'Praetorian Guard' . . . into a sixty thousand-strong fighting force . . ."⁷⁵

Conclusions. The lessons from a half-century of bitter experience suffered by governments involved in dealing with internal instabilities and nonstate actors show that a given international intervention often ends short of achieving the mandated peace. Military efforts at the tactical and operational levels—no matter how well conducted—are insufficient to deal with the entire task. Too often, this is because short-, mid-, and long-term strategic political-military objectives are unclear, the "end-game" is undefined, consistent and appropriate support is not provided, and civil-military unity of purpose remains unachieved. Thus, it is imperative to develop leaders and organizational structures that can generate strategic clarity and make it work. The sooner, the better.

Afterword.

Even though every internal conflict is situation specific, it is not completely unique. Throughout the universe of intranational war cases, there are analytical commonalities. The evidence clearly indicates that once security and the rule of law are firmly established, legitimate governance ultimately defeats a violent nonstate actor by removing the motives that created that adversary in the first place.

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